

SPANISH BLACK COUNTRY.

Said the midwife, "Come you here, John,
 Soon your wife will have a son ;
 Hold her up." And then his wife said,
 "This is not your fault, dear John."

Oh, he had no rest at all !

"Light the candle, bring the relic ;
 Virgin, of deliverance good,
 Come and help thy suffering sister ;
 Yes, we'll say a Litany."

Oh, but what a night for John !

"Well? and, after all, a daughter ;
 What a pity ; chew some hair,
 Then be sick. Now, bring me scissors,
 Thread, and clothes, and sash, and broth."

Oh, but what a night for John !

Poor John went to get his supper,
 When he heard the midwife scream,—
 "John, go get of peony syrup,
 And some fern of maiden's hair."

Not a wink of sleep for John !

"Yes, and viper's root, and white lead,
 And some sprigs of fever-fue,
 And some vessels, and some treacle."
 To the town once more John flew.

What a sleepless night for John !

Tired, returned he ; then the midwife
 Put the child into his arms,
 Saying,—“Nurse your precious daughter,
 She is worth a lump of gold.”

Not a wink of sleep for John !

To her home the midwife hieth ;
 John begins to think of rest,
 When his wife's dear mother crieth,
 "I've a bad pain in my breast !"

When will come some sleep for John ?

Reader, John Lanás speaks to you,
 Saying,—“ Now that once you know
 All a woman's evil customs,
 All the misery they bring.”
 (Never sleep hath come to John !)

“ Do not trust in them, as I did,
 But into your pocket put
 Your right hand, for two brown farthings,
 And just buy, and read, my book.”
 For John had no sleep that night !

In the above thoroughly Spanish ditty, I have suppressed all that could offend an English reader. Certainly, it is an indecent and coarse song ; but it is one of thousands, and is sold and sung without reserve to admiring crowds of the lower, respectable orders. But it is a sad witness to the depth to which a naturally high-minded population, such as the Spanish mining population, has been suffered to fall, simply from the want of “ true religion and useful learning,” that such themes as these, over which a veil should be ever drawn, should form the staple of their songs, and really rejoice their hearts.

There is but one more element—the political—to be noticed here ; and of that, time and space forewarn me to abstain from quoting a specimen at any length. Is it not enough to say, that, as a rule, the political pamphlet is read by very few, and understood by still fewer, and that, generally, its aim is to spread broadcast the seeds of dissatisfaction with any Government—save that of the Democratic Federal Republic ; that is, the division of the country into small cantones, each with its separate Government ? The most popular pamphlet on this subject, perhaps, is that called ‘ All or Nothing,’ with an in-

flammatory prologue, by Roqué Barcia, a pamphlet written not without real talent and insight into national characteristics. But to go into details would be to impose too great a task on the already wearied reader. Let me only now ask the reader to follow me from sunny, semi-tropical, uneducated Spain to two other climes.

The Spanish miner has no genius for mining—to him it is simply a means of winning bread—and so he has no distinctive literature. But turn, for one moment, to the German miner; he, at any rate, has his love of mining and his *esprit de corps*. He has his regular mining ballads, sung from the mine-owner to the pitman, all of which (and they have lately been published in a collected form in Leipzig) have a hearty, genial, moral tone, free from superstition and ribaldry, I believe, yet full of nature and of true religion. Here is the favourite song of the German miner, and many of my readers, doubtless, will be familiar with it; it is called “Ein Bergmannslied,” but is better known by the name of the chorus to each stanza, “Glückauf,”—i. e., “God-speed.”

I.

The merry bell, from yonder steep,
 Hath pealed its matin lay;
 To where the shaft looms, dark and deep,
 Come, comrades, let's away!
 Yet give your loves a parting kiss,
 A hearty kiss, then good-bye bliss,
 For such the life we lead;
 And now
 God speed our work! God speed!

II.

With fearless heart, and nimble tread,
 Each lad the shaft descends,

And at his post, for daily bread,
 With sturdy stroke contends.
 The waggons rattle ; all around
 Of pick and axe is heard the sound ;
 But of the blast take heed.
 And now
 God speed our work ! God speed !

III.

And, oh, if in the darksome mine,
 Death's hand on me be laid,
 He who hath willed it is divine,
 And, well I know, can aid.
 So, farewell, loves, dry up your tears,
 It is not death the miner fears,
 For Heaven is free from need
 And cares.
 God speed our work ! God speed !

How unstrained, how hearty, how natural, is the tone of this last!—above all, how healthy! To pass to it from the ephemeral themes that we have dwelt upon, necessarily, is like passing from the stagnant and relaxing river into the restless, bracing sea. And compare the literature of the poor Spaniard with that of his English brother, and see how few, in comparison, are his advantages. Take only one Society, that for Promoting Christian Knowledge, in England, and think of the blessings it puts within the reach of thousands, and then despise not the poor Spanish miner.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUNDAY'S WALK AMONG THE SPANISH MINERS.

So far as scenery is concerned, this part of the Black Country has nothing of grace or beauty to recommend it. Charles Kingsley has beautifully said that the Fen Country of Lincolnshire has a certain wild beauty, as of the sea, to charm the traveller. Waste after waste, field after field, hedgeless, treeless, but still with a certain amount of verdure, there meet the eye. But here the case is different. Here nothing but rolling plains, sometimes bearing crops of stunted corn, sometimes studded with that ugliest of stunted trees, the olive, are to be seen; and, when once the harvest is reaped, which is in May and June, the fierce sun soon turns what was green into wastes of withered stubble, and dry, arid dust.

It is not, then, natural beauty which will make our Sunday's walk interesting or picturesque. But the old tale of "eyes and no eyes" is true as ever, and a keen observer will find many things to interest him in our Sunday's walk.

On the Friday previous to the Sunday here described, one of the best-hearted, most popular, and richest men of the town had died, and, contrary to that Spanish law which decrees, and rightly enough, that every corpse be interred within twenty-four hours of death, the funeral of this man was delayed until Sunday, at nine o'clock.

On Saturday night, at twelve o'clock, I passed the windows of his ample house. To my surprise, a crowd of some hundreds was thronging around the window of the dead man's bed-room. I elbowed my way in. The windows, almost to the ground, were wide open, and there, lying stiffly upon his iron bedstead, was the dead body of Don Juan, exposed to the public gaze. The room was barren of every sort of furniture, save that at the foot of the bed was placed the gorgeous white-and-gold coffin, in readiness for the morrow's ceremony.

Two Spanish servants were watching, sadly enough, beside the corpse of him who had once been a generous master and a genial friend. A huge wax-candle burnt at each corner of the bed. The arms of the dead man were crossed, or rather folded upon his breast; kid gloves were upon his hands; his dress was the same that he was wont to use for state occasions; his massive gold watch-chain lay loosely on his breast; a few flowers were spread around his head.

"He sleeps calm enough now, anyhow," said a Spanish miner, who was looking on. "Will he meet Christ at the Judgment Day with those white-kid gloves on?"

We shuddered, and I passed on, at the ribald remark.

On Sunday morning, when I went out to get a breath of the balmy air before the heat of day, the poor decked-out body was borne forth to its last long home. But first it went to the church, where it was deposited, its coffin covered with passion-flowers and orange-blossoms, amid a whole circle of pig-skins full of wine, sacks of peas, and of wheat, upon the floor of the church. These last were the offerings to the

priests of the church, who, for the space of half-an-hour, said the solemn Spanish service for the burial of the dead.

Then, followed by over 2,000 people, the long train moved forth, headed by eight priests, to the rough and rocky and unkempt cemetery, where the genial comrade, the warm, kind, honest heart was to find its last earthly resting-place.

My walk lay onwards to the distant mines, and I determined, as the day had dawned so full of interest, to jot down all that interested me.

First, then, came a Spanish herdsman carrying a tiny lamb, literally "in his bosom," and, behind him, a boy, whose burden should have been the lightest, bearing on his shoulders, by its two fore-legs, the lame mother; and I could not help remarking how vividly the words of the Holy Scripture were thus illustrated, "The little ewe lamb, which lay in the poor man's bosom, and was unto him as a daughter," and "The shepherd who beareth home his lost sheep on his shoulders rejoicing." And rejoicing these men surely were, for gayer prattle I never heard.

The most painful part of the walks in the Spanish interior, is that you hear on every side, from mule-driver, donkey-driver, and—when you pass a washing-ground—washerwomen, the coarsest and vilest language imaginable,—language so coarse, so obscene, that one can hardly persuade oneself that one is walking in a civilized and in a (so-called) Christian country. The muleteer or donkey-driver calls his donkey by an obscene and vile name. If enraged, he will say to his companions, "I spit upon ten," pronouncing the word diez (the Spanish for ten) as though it were Dios (God), as I have before observed,

and so conveying the worst and rankest form of blasphemy against the Creator's name. While the mildest form of vituperation among the washerwomen will be, "Your mother was a w——; go you and wallow in the water-closet."

Indeed, low-sunken, degraded, and utterly ignorant as are the masses in Spain, any one who judged of them by their language would form an estimate of their moral state even lower than would be correct.

Just before we left the dreary, dusty outskirts of the town, we came upon a litter resting in the middle of the rock-strewn road, the four bearers standing by smoking and wiping the perspiration from their foreheads and bare chests. The litter was covered with black canvas, and was curtained round with the same, to keep off the fierce glare of the sun. In the litter lay a fine young fellow, who had just broken his arm in two places by a fall from a ladder in a distant mine. He had been carried thus for five weary miles! Of course, owing to the rocky and uneven nature of the roads, the only means of transit for a wounded man from the mine to the hospital is the litter.

I said to one of the bearers,—“Is he badly hurt?”

“Bastante malo” (Badly enough) was the heartless answer.

Amid the stunted growth of wheat and barley I noticed a number of dark purple flowers, and, casting my eye over the fields, which were of sandy soil, running down to the water's edge, I noticed that they lent quite a purple hue to the corn, much as the “red poppy” tinges the English corn-fields with its pervading scarlet. On plucking one, I found it to be a sort of purple iris, with four or five flowers on each

stem, and sword-like leaves. I asked my guard the Spanish name for it, and he said at once, "Lirio del campo" (the lily of the field); and, looking at its exceedingly delicate petals, which wither almost as soon as plucked, and its beautiful hues, varying from deep crimson to the darkest purple, I could not help thinking that this, if, as I believe, it ranks among the Flora of Palestine and be found on those slopes of corn-fields that run down to the shores of the Lake of Galilee, might be the "lily of the field" to which "even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed" in equal beauty!

The botanical knowledge of the Spaniards, high and low, is something pitiable. Indeed, of the natural history of their country they know absolutely nothing, and one name serves for twenty different flowers. Every bird is a "pajaro" (or "bird")! Every insect or reptile is a "becho" (or "beast")! Indeed, the only real botanical knowledge in the interior is confined to the "Government herbalists." These are a kind of what, in England, would be called "quack doctors," who go forth from the large towns in the spring months—February, March, April, and the earlier part of May—and, rambling over mountain, meadow, field, and mere, collect specimens of the various herbs and plants mentioned in their text-book.

These men are licensed and paid by Government for their labours, and are thorough believers in the fact (noticed in my sketch of a Spanish winter garden) that each locality bears among its flowers and herbs the very cure appointed by Providence for the diseases of that special district.

Their recognized text-book, which they carry with them on their rambles, is 'The Herbal of Dioscorides,'

translated from the Greek into Spanish, and "conforme el Catalogo Nuevo del Santo Oficio de la Inquisicion." The book is profusely illustrated, and bears date, "Valencia, 1695."

There are, however, several sacred flowers, every feature of each one of which is dear to the heart of the poor Spanish miner; and, chiefly, he reveres with a superstitious reverence the passion-flower. Pluck a sprig of it from some rude road-side hut, and he will delight in dissecting it, and explaining its history, "Here," he will say, "are the seven petals: these are the disciplina of the Christ; here are the three Marias; here, in this twisting tendril, see the cordon of the Christ; here are the three clavos (nails) with heads; here is the bitter cup, or caliz; here are the five fajas, or swathing bands for burial; here (in a little space beneath the crown of the flower) is a drop of honey: taste how sweet it is: yes, indeed, for it is the blood shed for us; and, lastly, here is the corona! Is it not all perfect, señor? Gracias á Dios!"

As you pass on your way, and it begins to grow toward evening, you will meet little knots of picturesquely dressed campo-men, or labourers; they are all hurrying to the town to get there by half-past four or five o'clock. Arrived there, they sit in a wide semicircle on the paving-stones around the Plaza, or market-place,—a motley crowd they are, too,—and there they wait until the steward, or farmer, comes to hire them. I have often counted 200 waiting, at early morn, or at eve, to be hired; seen many fulfilling the words of the Scripture, by "standing there all the day idle," and, if you ask one of them why he is not at work, his answer will be given in the words, "Because no man hath hired me!"

So strikingly, in this primitive land, with its many Oriental elements, are the very words of Holy Writ illustrated.

Passing through the olive-groves, where the lumps and cairns of granite, half-covered in wiry creepers, offer shelter to innumerable reptiles, the only sound you will hear is the shrill silvery note of myriads upon myriads of cicadas—a silvery tinkle that absolutely fills the air. The only sign of life will be the numberless brown and green lizards, darting across your path with the speed of lightning, to hide themselves in the crevices of the stones.

The mining population have a curious superstition regarding the green lizard, which sometimes is as much as a foot-and-a-half in length.

The superstition is as follows:—Occasionally, whether naturally or by accident, the tail of this reptile is divided into three points of equal length, or nearly so, in which case it is called by the ignorant Spaniard “the three-tailed lizard.” If you can catch one of these, and place it in a box, with a quantity of small bits of paper, each bearing one number of the coming lottery, from which you have to make your choice of a number, the three-tailed lizard will always eat up the ticket which bears the winning number. That this belief has been constantly acted upon, in implicit faith in the wisdom of the lizard, I can myself testify; indeed, no earthly argument would persuade the miner that his theory about the three-tailed lizard is an incorrect one.

Should the lizard refuse to eat any one of the squares of paper, he will dip its three tails into black ink; and as the poor wretch crawls away, and crosses and re-crosses its proper prison-floor, the number of the

successful ticket will be easily (so the gambler says) deciphered from the trail! No doubt a lizard with three tails would make a hieroglyphic which might be turned into a numeral, far more easily than the ordinary one-tailed reptile, as Mother Nature has fashioned it, not for making numerals on paper, but for steering and aiding its lightning-like flight.

So, through the olive-grove and over the crumbling stone wall, and through the "patio" of the olive-guard's comfortless lodge, we pass on toward the mine. The tender green tendril of the vine is already hanging gracefully over the rude framework put for its support in front of the dark stone shanty. Already the kindly, rough hostess has espied your advent, and is awaiting you with a stirrup-cup of Val-de-Peñas blanco (white wine of La Mancha), which she presses on you, and you must not refuse; and she bids you depart with the Spanish religious woman's benison, "Vaya usted con Dio y con la Virgen!" (Depart you with God and the Virgin!) And now we are at the mines.

On the day on which I write, two deeds of blood occurred. I had not been there ten minutes, and was sitting in the tiny house of a stalwart Welsh miner, when a pistol-shot rang out from the neighbouring venta—a house of bad repute, on the outskirts of a mine. Two men had quarrelled, and one passed by, escorted by his friends, a pistol-bullet in his bandaged arm, from which the blood was slowly oozing out. Sickened at the sight, I returned home somewhat early, and while on the road my companion, a Spanish miner, said, "Do you know the postman of this mine has been stabbed, and is nearly dead? There he goes." I looked, and half-a-mile in front,

sure enough, was the litter, followed by a crowd of miners, which contained the body of the poor lad who had fallen a victim to a quarrelsome drunkard's knife—a knife that had, ere now, taken one human life. Just ahead of the litter was a cloud of dust, slowly receding. It was the body of Municipal Guards, escorting the murderer to the prison, there to lie, perhaps, for months or even years, awaiting the doom of human law in Spain—not death, but imprisonment. Slowly I dragged my sickening heart and weary footsteps toward home. The shades of evening were falling, and I had yet a mile of lonely road to travel with my one companion. Suddenly, rising up silently from behind a block of granite, two men, the brass plates upon their breasts and leather shoulder-belt proclaiming them Guards of the Campo, drew near me, and, gun in hand, one on either side, began to accompany me. I asked what it meant, and the chief answered, quietly, "It is a bad time of day, and a bad day for crime; we will see you to the outskirts of your pueblo." This they did, and departed as silently as they had joined me.

As I neared the washing-grounds and watering-troughs, a couple of troops of Hussars, in stable-dress, were riding down to water their horses from the posadas and private houses where they were billeted, mingling with the crowd of water-carriers, male and female (these latter in their yellow serge petticoats, brown, plump feet, and rich black hair framing a mahogany face), who were filling the pitchers on their donkeys for their last evening round. The Hussars, with bare or sandalled feet, tight-fitting blue-jackets, and trousers of any colour and shape, sitting bare-backed on their spirited Andalusian steeds, and curbing

them without bridle, by the steel nose-band, formed a group for a painter. All was noise, oaths, strange language, and confusion.

At the hospital a crowd was collected to know the result of the doctor's examination of the poor lad who had been cut down in the prime of life by a felon-stroke. It was all over: life's brief drama, for him, was ended; the alcalde of the town, followed by two guards, pushed his way through the crowd to perform his office.

Just then the poor father of the lad rode up on his donkey to ask what was the matter. "A man stabbed," said the rough but tender-hearted crowd; "but we don't know who it is." And, little dreaming that he was turning his back on the still warm body of his only son, within those mouldering hospital walls, the father, humming his Andalucian ditty of love or war, rode slowly on to his night work at the mine! "Telle est la vie"—in Spain!

CHAPTER XVII.

LIFE AND CHARACTER OF GERMAN AND SPANISH MINERS
CONTRASTED.

HAVING drawn out in detail the prominent points of contrast between the life and character of the English and Spanish miners, it may be interesting to some still following the fortunes of the miners of Europe, and sharing with them their sorrow and their joy, to transport ourselves to that triangular district of ground pregnant with mineral, which is bounded on one side by the fine, rugged range of the Erz-Gebirge, and on another by the rolling waters of the Elbe.

The contrast between the life and character of the English and Spanish miner has been seen to be great; that between the Spanish and German will prove to be greater still.

The following are stray notes and reminiscences of the mines and miners of the Erz-Gebirge, a district, the central town of which is Freiberg.

The mines of the Erz-Gebirge are chiefly of lead, silver, and galena ore, and, some years since, were exceedingly rich in metal, but have now been worked to an enormous depth, and are found to be daily becoming poorer. Most of these mines are the property of the Saxon Government, which, like that of Spain, has been wise enough to monopolize the best mines in its wild country, and thus secure a considerable income

in addition to its revenues. Each mine is managed by one or more German engineers, who are very able and capable men. Indeed, as in Spain, the profession of the mining engineer is considered one of the gentle professions, and men of good family and position enter upon it. The engineers of this district have first to pass through a severe course of study at the Mining Academy of Freiberg, and then to serve an apprenticeship to practical mining engineering, the Saxon Government thus securing efficient and tried managers of the mines.

In Spain, the official working staff of a mine is cut down to the lowest dimensions compatible with some amount of safety; and the machinery is often old-fashioned and defective, whereas in Germany the number of paid officials constantly exceeds the real demands of the work, and the machinery is of the best and newest construction. In fact, roughly stated, it may be said that practical mining is really the genius of the German mind, as of the English, whereas the Spaniard too often only lends himself to it as a necessity.

Stand with me, as the sun is just reddening the crest of the wild hills of the Erz-Gebirge, and see the German miners pass to their weary round of dark and unhealthy and ill-requited work. Here they come, in their long blouses, wearily plodding their way along the stony paths. They look worn, sad, and somewhat stupid men, their air far different from that of the jaunty, careless, ephemeral Andaluz. And why so? Simply because their wages, poor fellows! are on a scale probably lower than that of any body of men in the world, and poverty and poor, hard fare make a man's step weary and his face sad. Yet, ere

the bell has sent forth its summons over hill and dale, every man is here, in his place, ready to descend the shaft. And well for him that he is ready, for few laws are stricter, and none are more severely insisted upon, than the Mining Code of Saxony.

True, the Spanish code of mining laws is strict enough; but then, although first-rate in theory, in Spain we never think of enforcing our laws!

Every German miner is subject to imprisonment for any neglect of duty; and whereas his Spanish or English brother (although the English has no special mining code) would hardly bear a reprimand for absenting himself from work without a fair cause, the poor German actually hardly complains if he be marched off to prison for his slight omission. The Englishman's love of money, high wages, and sterling common-sense, lead him to work regularly; the German works regularly because he is punished in default of doing so; the Spaniard neither takes thought for the morrow, nor will submit to the slightest restraint; he is a caballero (gentleman), and will do as he pleases.

Here, then, around the dressing-houses, waiting to put on their dark calico blouses for the pit-work, are the underground men. There is no cigarette in mouth, but each has just put out his clumsy pipe of crockeryware. They stand, a group of broad-shouldered, short, silent, impassionless men.

And now, listen to the roll-call! There are no absentees from duty. The manager then, in dead silence, takes out a form of prayer from his pocket; every head is bared. How exquisite is the spirit, how simply beautiful and touching are the words of the prayer that now wells forth from his lips, praying

the Almighty God to protect them throughout their dangerous work, and to keep wife, sweetheart, children, safe against their return home. The prayer ended, the response, "So be it," is murmured from the lips of the assembled crowd, who now press into the undressing sheds.

Germany is the land of law and order; and although the Cornishman would object to this "prayer by law established" (in the district of which I write), because he prefers extempore, and the Spaniard would wholly disregard it, yet the Saxon miner loves, and feels a comfort in, the petition offered for and with him, and is thankful to accept and join in it; and although one half of his number is Roman Catholic, and one half Lutheran, yet all join in prayer on the brink of the pit to "the one Lord and Father of us all."

I should say that the moment the prayer is concluded a hundred stentorian voices join, with bare heads and uplifted voices, and eyes upturned to the clouded skies, in a hymn, much, in character and feeling, like the English Morning Hymn at the end of the Prayer-Book.

Then the poor fellows descend, as the bell chimes out once more from the stone turret, to seek their work and their labour until the evening.

But how does the German miner descend, and what words are on his lips as he leaves the daylight, perhaps never, in this world, to return to it alive?

He is sent down in the *Fahr-kunst*, or "man-engine," which is worked by the pumping-engine, and consists of a number of stages, attached to the rods, the miner stepping from one to the other until he reaches the particular level where lies his work.